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SHOPPER ATTITUDES AND TRADE AREAS
FOR DISCOUNT STORES IN
GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

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Published by

Population Committee
Research Division
Greensboro Chamber of
Commerce
Greensboro, North Carolina

April 1970

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is very appreciative of assistance given in the interviewing and tabulating of data by two geography students at UNC-G.

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During the mid-twentieth century, the downtown central business district (CBD) has increasingly lost its relative importance as the heart of most cities in the United States.

During the 1960s, however, shopping centers and discount stores appeared in most communities of more than 20,000 people. These retail establishments have since diverted a sizeable part of the trade from the central business districts and have, thus, changed the spatial patterns for shopping trips.

Another alteration of shopping habits has resulted from the opening of discount stores on Sunday. The availability of a wide range of consumer goods in these businesses has led many people to shop on Sunday.

The Problem

The purpose of this paper is to examine the attitudes and characteristics of shoppers at discount stores as they relate to spatial shopping patterns, and to determine the trade areas of discount stores in Greensboro.

Answers will be sought to the following questions:

1. Which attitudes of shoppers influence spatial shopping patterns?

2. What similarities and differences are there between Thursday and Sunday shoppers?
3. What are the family characteristics of discount store shoppers?
4. What are the trade areas of the three discount stores participating in the study?
5. What attitudes do shoppers exhibit concerning shopping on Sunday?

The Procedure

Information for this study was obtained from three of the five major discount stores in Greensboro. (The other two stores would not allow interviewing on their premises.) A printed questionnaire was used to obtain the desired information (Figure 1).

Fifty personal interviews were conducted between 12 noon and 4:00 p.m. throughout each of the three stores on Thursdays and Sundays between November 20 and December 18, 1969. A total of three hundred interviews was taken. The stores included in the study are Zayre Discount Department Store in the southwestern section of the town at the corner of High Point Road and Holden Road, King's Department Store in the northwest part at the corner of West Market Street and Muirs Chapel Road, and Clarks Department Store, in the eastern section on East Market Street - Burlington Road east of Huffine Mill Road (Figure 2).

POPULATION SURVEY

1. How often do you shop here? _____
2. Did you come by car, bus, walking? _____
3. Do you ever shop at any other discount store? yes _____ no _____
4. (Thurs. Shopper) Do you ever shop on Sunday? yes _____ no _____
5. If stores were open on Sunday in downtown would you shop there? yes _____ no _____
6. Why do you like to shop here?

prices
convenience
other

trans.
store appear.

prox. to other stores
variety of merchandise

7. Do you shop for particular items? _____
8. If so, what _____ why _____
9. Where do you live? (exact location) _____
10. Do you shop less often downtown than five years ago? _____
 If yes, why? closer _____ less noisy _____
 easier to shop _____ less crowded _____
 better prices _____ merchandise _____
 easier to park _____
11. How long does it take you to get to this store from your house? _____
12. Why are you shopping here today instead of another day? _____
13. How many people are with you? _____
14. What did you buy? _____
15. How much did you spend? _____
16. Characteristics of people living with respondent:

no. male _____ no. female _____ no. children under 18 _____

	Age	Ed. Com.	Type of Work	Take Home Pay
Head				
Spouse				
Other adult				
Other adult				

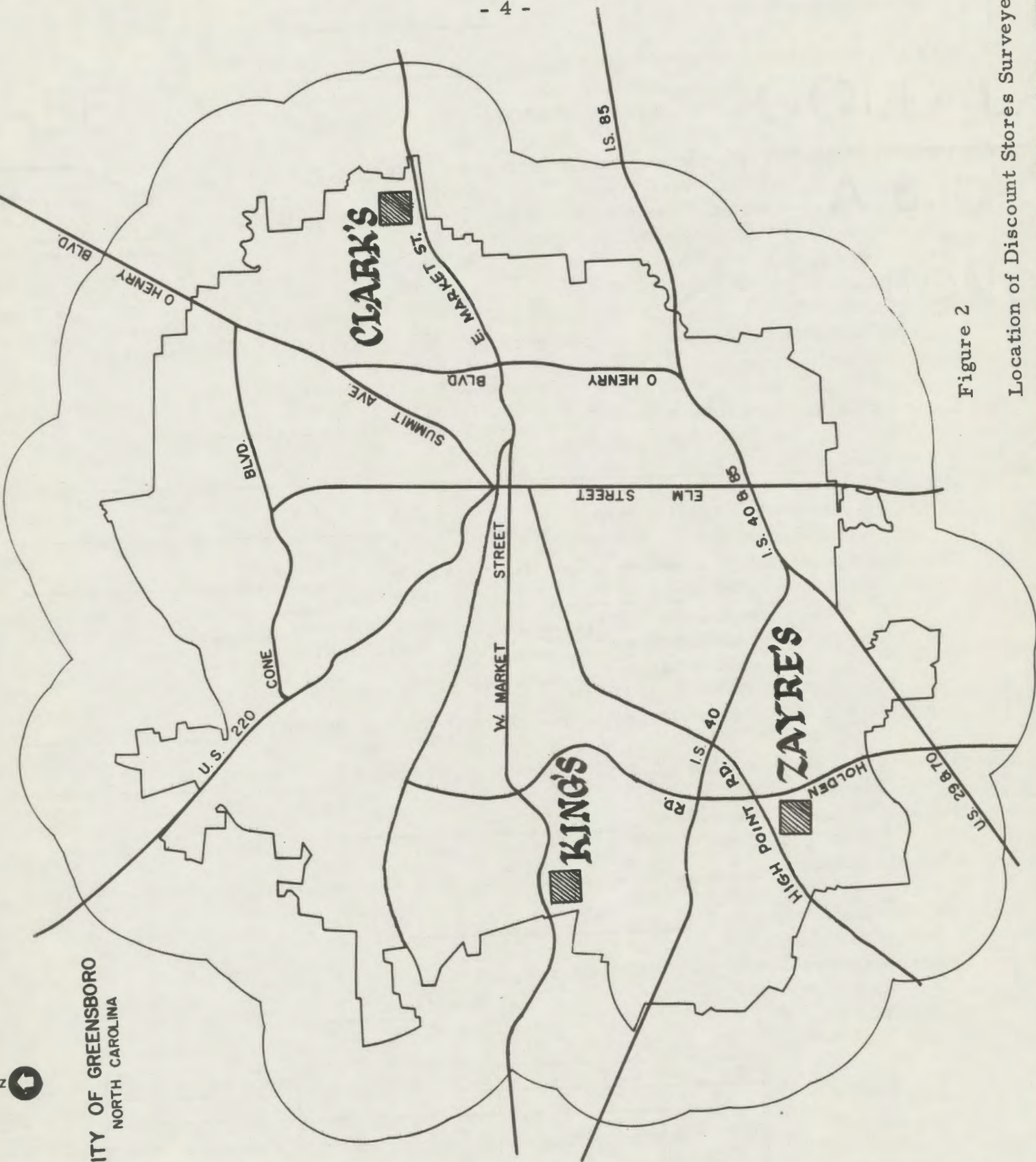
Household Income Groups

0-3,000	6,000-9,000	12,000-15,000
3,000-6,000	9,000-12,000	15,000-18,000
		18,000-& over

Figure 1



CITY OF GREENSBORO
NORTH CAROLINA



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Figure 2

Location of Discount Stores Surveyed

Shopper Attitudes and Changes in Spatial Shopping Patterns

The relative degree of awareness of an individual of the various factors influencing his decision to take certain actions is an extremely important consideration for those who will consequently be affected. His perception of distance traveled and other conditions which exist may result from objective and rigorous measurements of them, but frequently his sensitivity to these factors can result from subconscious evaluations.

The attitudes which one acquires do not necessarily reflect the true situation. However, as long as he perceives his surroundings in a certain way, the individual will undoubtedly continue to act accordingly. This concept can be applied to decision-making regarding shopping patterns,

In investigating the relationships between perception and spatial shopping patterns, one is to a certain extent examining the resulting relative preferences of individuals. However, this study does not intend to show how many persons choose the central business district instead of discount stores for shopping, or vice versa. What is attempted is an exploration of the reasons why persons who shop in the latter do so rather than going downtown.

Some factors influencing an individual to frequent a discount house instead of a downtown business can be obtained by inquiring as to why he shops in that discount store and whether he shops downtown less often today than five years ago, and, if so, why.

Almost one-third of the respondents go to the discount house because of the relatively lower prices (Table 1). This illustrates the attention paid by many shoppers to competitive pricing of products. As the cost of living continues to rise, prices of items might well attract closer scrutiny by the housewife.

TABLE I
REASONS FOR SHOPPING AT DISCOUNT STORES

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per Cent</u>
Prices	93	31.0
Convenience	92	30.7
Merchandise	78	26.0
Open on Sunday	10	3.3
Proximity to residence	10	3.3
Transportation	12	4.0
Store appearance	5	1.7
Proximity to other stores	0	0

In addition to cost, the merchandise available is an important factor influencing a person to trade at a certain store. Over one-fourth of the respondents shop at discount stores for this reason. Coincidentally, approximately the same proportion indicate they shop for particular items. Nearly sixty per cent choose to go to a discount house either because of the prices or the kinds of products sold.

Nearly another one-third trade in these stores because of convenience, that is, the time which it takes to get to them and the availability of parking. Greater convenience is evidently not related to being close enough to walk, since ninety-nine per cent travel by car.

The degree of complexity in the spatial shopping patterns can be seen to an even greater extent by noting that between eighty-five and ninety per cent of these people also frequent other discount houses.

If so many persons shop at two or more of these stores, what influence does this have on downtown businesses? Most of the discount houses in Greensboro have been built within the last five years. Do people who shop at these stores, shop downtown less often than they did then?

Approximately seventy per cent do shop downtown less frequently than five years ago. This, of course, does not indicate an absolute decline in retail sales in the central business district, but rather a relatively lower percentage of total city sales.

The opening of additional retail establishments outside the CBD naturally introduces competition. But what comparative advantages do the discount stores have over downtown businesses?

The major competitive disadvantage of the CBD appears to be related to parking (Table II). Over forty per cent of those shopping downtown more infrequently now than five years ago state that the reason is the greater difficulty in parking there than at the discount houses. Although the higher cost of parking downtown was not listed as a separate choice, this factor could be considered as an influence on this situation. An abundance of free parking at the discount centers is certainly an element in attracting business. The importance of adequate parking is obvious when realizing

that ninety-nine per cent of the discount store shoppers travel by car.

More than one-fourth of those shopping downtown less often now indicate that the task is more difficult there. A store which can offer a wide variety of goods under one roof does have a certain advantage. The right combination of leadership, imagination, ingenuity, initiative, planning, and capital for the CBD could overcome most of the criticism. In the author's opinion, a two-to-four block all-weather mall on Elm Street would help to revitalize and revolutionize shopping in downtown Greensboro.

The third main factor related to the relative decline of downtown retail business is the greater distance from the residences of people to the CBD. About one-sixth of those shopping there less frequently give this as the reason. Although the relative physical distances can hardly be altered, adequate free, or low-cost, parking and an esthetically appealing mall should counter-balance to a great degree the influence of proximity, as well as many of the criticisms of the shoppers.

TABLE II

REASONS FOR SHOPPING DOWNTOWN LESS OFTEN
TODAY THAN FIVE YEARS AGO

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per Cent</u>
Closer to discount store	37	18.0
Easier to shop at discount store	55	26.7
Lower prices at discount store	8	3.9
Easier to park at discount store	85	41.3
Not as crowded at discount store	9	4.4
Less noise at discount store	8	3.9
More merchandise at discount store	4	1.9

Neither prices nor kinds of merchandise appears to be an important competitive reason for the decline in downtown trade among discount house shoppers. From the attitudes expressed by those questioned, one could conclude that certain discount stores attract customers because of low prices, convenience, and available merchandise, but that their relative advantages over CBD establishments is significantly related to only one of these, convenience. This factor is indicated by shoppers as easier parking, easier shopping, and greater proximity of the discount houses.

The automobile in providing an instrument for individual spatial mobility enables the consumer to travel numerous criss-cross patterns in visiting different stores within the city. Since these complex patterns developed significantly during the last decade, the car should be viewed more as a catalyst rather than a cause of these patterns. The role of public transport in this change has been important in the sense that these facilities have been de-emphasized as means of intra-urban transportation relative to the automobile. Duke Power buses only go to Kings and to within one-half mile of Clarks. Moreover, both a Duke Power and a Suburban bus must usually be used to get to Zayre on High Point Road.. Only one person out of three hundred used this means of travel to the discount stores.

Shopper Characteristics

Many Sunday shoppers are theorized to be persons who have less opportunity to shop during other days of the week. Thus, they would trade at these stores less often than do the Thursday shoppers. Indeed, the former do visit the discount centers an average of once every thirteen to fourteen days, while the latter go there about one out of every six days. Therefore, Thursday shoppers go to a discount store more than twice as often as do Sunday customers.

Although an important disparity exists between these two groups for shopping frequencies, no significant differences appear among the reasons for shopping on the particular day of the week on which the interview was made. Only two of the one hundred and fifty Sunday shoppers were there because it was Sunday.

The average number of individuals traveling to the discount stores in each car on these two days of the week is very different. On Thursday, only an average of 2.2 people came together; however, on Sunday, the mean was 3.6. This is probably due largely to the fact that both the husband and wife are not working on the latter day and the children are not in school. This larger number of shoppers coming together on Sunday could lead one to assume that a greater potential exists for each family to spend more money on that day than on the weekday.

Sunday shoppers generally do spend somewhat more than do

Thursday shoppers. Because too few responses were obtained from Clarks, only data for amount of money spent has been calculated for the other two stores. The results show that, on the average, each Sunday purchaser spends at least \$2.50 more than does the Thursday one. This could be partially a reflection of the greater average number of passengers per car on the former day.

Only about one-fourth of those going to the discount store shop there for particular items. The most important products sought are clothing and various goods for children, which account for about forty per cent of the total. Housewares, cosmetics, and "specials" contribute ten per cent each.

Although nearly three-fourths of the customers do not go to these stores to obtain certain items, they do generally tend to purchase the same articles as those persons who do shop for particular goods. The categories do not vary significantly from one store to another. On the whole, over one-third of the customers buys clothing. With the exception of those purchases specified as being for Christmas (which undoubtedly reflect the time of the year in which the interviews were taken), the other leading items are for children and the home.

Various population characteristics of the families of shoppers are helpful in reflecting the particular clientele that the discount houses serve. Thus, those downtown businesses which sell products that would compete for this group are the stores that have the most to lose directly.

However, most merchants in the CBD are probably affected in at least a secondary way by these persons not going to the downtown area to shop.

The number of males and females per household is nearly the same, with the average being 1.6 and 1.7, respectively. The average size of the family is 3.3 persons. The major difference between the family size of Thursday and Sunday shoppers' households is that the former peaks at four, while the latter peaks at two and has a large number in the five-to-six category. Yet, as was previously mentioned, more persons go together on Sunday than on Thursday. Zayre's customers have more families with higher numbers of children and fewer with no children than is the case for the other two stores.

The mean ages of the household heads is older than those of the spouses for every store and each day. The average ages of heads and spouses are lower on Sunday than on Thursday in five out of six times. (In the other case the difference is negligible.) The mean ages for heads and spouses are about three years younger on Sunday than on Thursday, being 36.2 and 39.1, respectively, for the former group, and 33.3 and 36.2, in that order, for the latter. In addition, the household heads are approximately three years older than the spouses on each day, being 39.1 and 36.2, respectively, for Thursday, and 36.2 and 33.3, in that order, for Sunday.

Higher educational levels are found among the Thursday customers, the spouses, and those who shop at King's. However, most of

the differences are less than one year. The mean education ranges from eleven years at Clarks to twelve years at King's.

Blue-collar workers substantially outnumber white-collar persons among the shoppers in all the stores on both days, except at King's on Thursday. Professional occupations are not often represented among the customers of any of the three discount houses.

Only a limited response was obtained for household income. Thus, only occupational indicators can be used to gain some ideas as to the potential buying power of the families.

Trade Areas

The trade areas for each of the three discount stores are much greater on Sunday than on Thursday (Figures 3, 4, and 5). The 95 per cent confidence limits for distance¹ for Sunday for each store are more than twice those for Thursday.

Clarks has by far the largest trade area for both Thursday and Sunday, with its 95 per cent confidence limits being 21.35 miles and 46.23 miles, respectively. Using these findings as statistical inferences of the total population, Clarks can be expected to have ninety-five per cent of its shoppers coming from residences no more than 21.35 miles away on Thursday and 46.23 miles on Sunday. Inversely, five per cent of the shoppers will probably drive further distances.

¹A 95 per cent confidence limit for distance is the miles that ninety-five per cent of the shoppers live from a certain store.

One possible reason for the much greater trade area for Clarks than the other two stores might be that the interviewing conducted at the former took place closer to Christmas than was true for the other two stores. Nevertheless, all three seemed to be influenced to a certain extent by the holiday season.

King's and Zayre's 95 per cent confidence limits for each day are nearly the same, with the Thursday ones being between 10.5 and 11.8 miles and the Sunday ones being about 27.1 miles.

The Thursday trade areas of these stores are generally confined to an area surrounding Greensboro within only a relatively short distance. The location of the store in either the eastern or the western part of town seems to influence the direction of greater extent of penetration. Thus, Clarks--located near the eastern city limit--includes Burlington, but not High Point, within its Thursday trade area, while Zayre and King's--both situated on the western side of town--contain High Point, but not Burlington, within their areas. None of the Thursday trade areas extend to Winston-Salem, although Clarks has a significant north-south reach that the other two stores do not.

The Sunday trade areas are much greater than the Thursday ones. Again, the orientation of place of residence for the shoppers at King's and Zayre is more to the west and for those at Clarks more to the east, although all three trade areas encompass Winston-Salem. Important north-south extensions exist for each store, with King's penetrating the

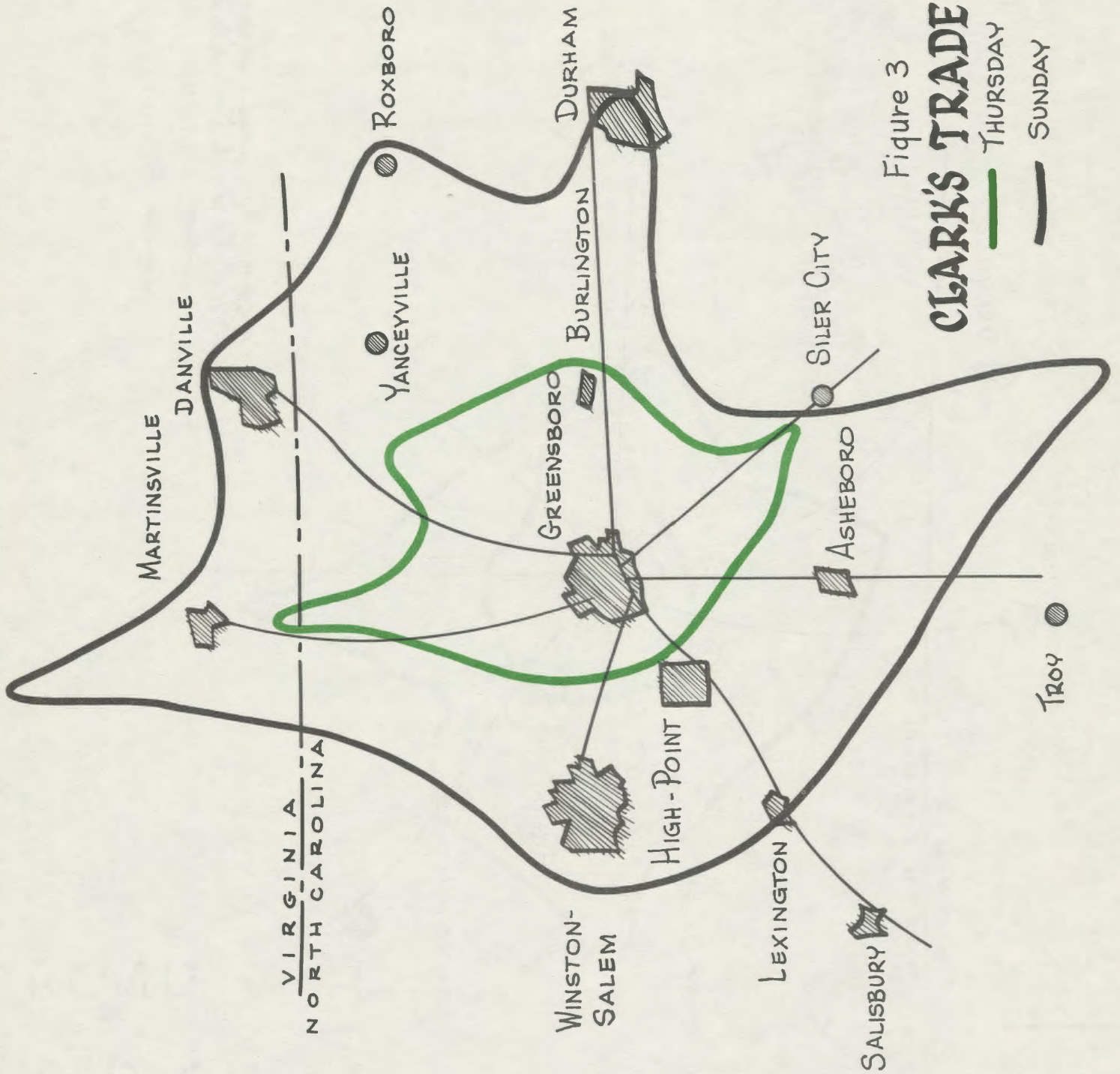


Figure 3

CLARK'S TRADE AREA

THURSDAY

SUNDAY

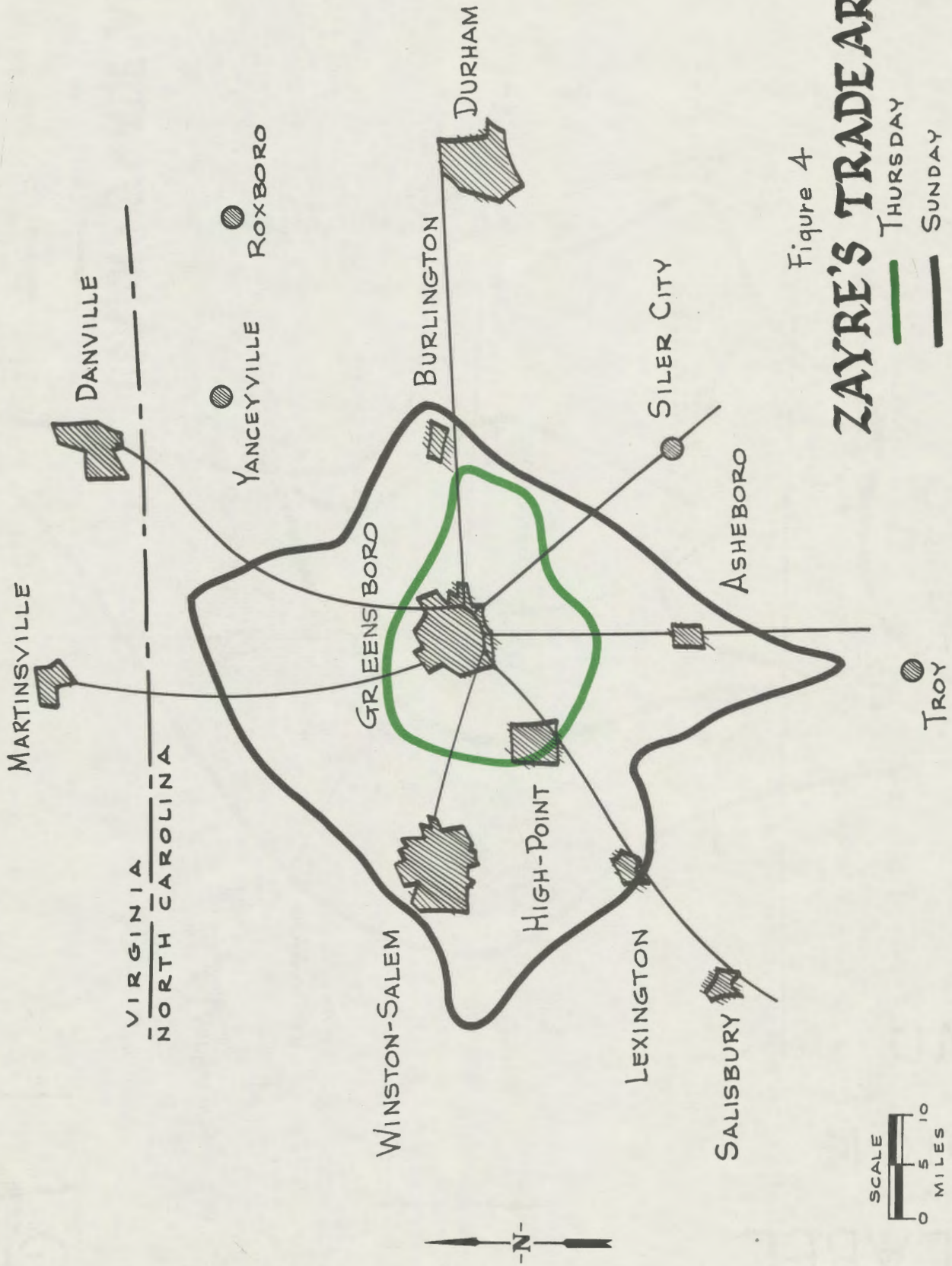


Figure 4
ZAYRE'S TRADE AREA

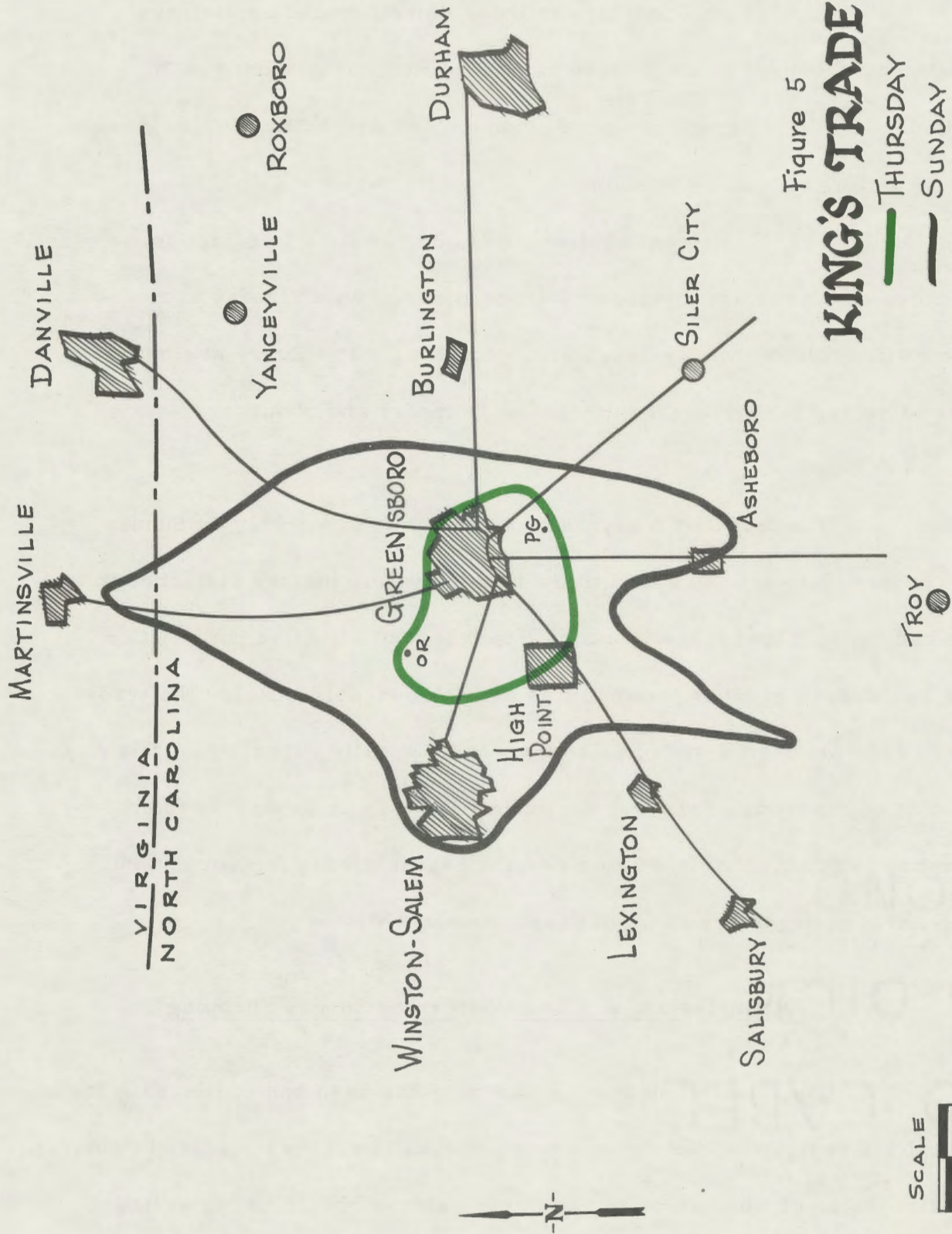


Figure 5

KING'S TRADE AREA

THURSDAY
SUNDAY

Virginia state line and Clarks including both Danville and Martinsville.

Similar relationships to those demonstrated by distance traveled by shoppers to each store can be found in time spent reaching each one. Again, Clarks' and Sunday customers are willing to use more time in getting to a place to shop.

The 95 per cent confidence limits for time in going from residence to Clarks are about forty-three minutes on Thursday and seventy-five minutes on Sunday. Those for King's and Zayre are between twenty-five and twenty-eight minutes on Thursday and about forty-six minutes on Sunday.

The fact that many more people are not working on Sunday and are therefore free to spend more time traveling further distances to shop and the fact that there is a significant lack of effective competition from businesses in most communities near Greensboro enables the trade areas of the discount stores in this town to be greatly expanded on this day. The size of the trade areas and the magnitude of their expansion from Thursday to Sunday may vary to a certain degree among the stores, but the general patterns are consistent and consequential.

Attitudes and Actions Concerning Sunday Shopping

The question of Sunday shopping has been one of the main issues of local interest within the Greensboro community during the last six months. The discussion of whether or not any or all stores should be permitted to

transact business on Sunday has contained social, economic, political, and religious connotations.

Obviously, a very large number of persons within and surrounding Greensboro support Sunday shopping. This can be easily verified by driving by one of the discount stores on Sunday afternoon. During the Christmas season, many downtown establishments claimed better sales on Sunday than during almost any weekday.²

Nevertheless, many other individuals are in disagreement with this practice for a variety of reasons. In order to gain some indication of the attitudes of the public concerning this issue, Thursday shoppers were asked whether they ever shop on Sunday. Forty-eight per cent do and fifty-two per cent do not. These proportions reflect the belief of many people in the community--that the opposing forces are nearly equally divided numerically. Nevertheless, the shoppers at the three stores did vary somewhat in their answers, with Zayre having the highest percentage of Thursday shoppers who shop on Sunday.

When both Thursday and Sunday shoppers were asked whether they would shop on Sunday in the downtown area if stores were open, only twenty-six per cent said yes. This clearly is a reflection of other attitudes which were stated previously concerning preferential shopping habits, as well as, perhaps, an indication that traditional concepts have not

²Hugh Page, "Sunday Retailing Brisk", Greensboro Record, November 10, 1969.

been transferred or related to discount stores.

Whereas nearly one-half of the Thursday customers shop on Sunday, less than twenty per cent of them would shop downtown on that day if the stores were open. Only about one-third of those already shopping on Sunday indicate that they would shop in the CBD, if possible. Interestingly, several approve of shopping in discount stores on Sunday, but not downtown. For these persons, the convenience of the former has apparently acted as an intervening opportunity between the creed of the "Protestant ethic" and individual actions.

After having noted the changes in spatial shopping patterns and the related shopper attitudes, one can more easily understand the apprehension of downtown merchants concerning the Sunday openings of local discount stores and vigorous support given to the drive to close these businesses on Sunday. Surprisingly, however, despite shopper and downtown merchant perceptions of potential shopping activities in the CBD on Sunday, it should be remembered that several businesses in this area reported better sales on Sunday than on weekdays during the year-end holiday season.

Summary and Conclusions

Shopper attitudes have an important relationship to buying habits and spatial shopping patterns. Discount stores have had a significant impact upon the changes in these practices.

The major reasons why persons shop at discount stores are low prices, merchandise available, and convenience. Between eighty-five and ninety per cent of these individuals visit more than one of these stores.

Nearly seventy per cent of the discount store shoppers shop less frequently downtown today than five years ago. The major reasons for this are the problems related to parking in the CBD, greater difficulty in shopping there because of congestion, and further distances from their residences to the CBD than to nearby discount stores. In general, the main competitive advantage of the latter seems to be greater convenience.

Thursday customers shop at discount stores more than twice as often as Sunday shoppers. However, nearly two-thirds more people come shopping on Sunday in each car and on the average each purchaser spends over \$2.50 more on this day than he does on Thursday. Whereas most discount store shoppers do not come to buy specific items, they usually purchase either clothing or goods for children.

The Sunday shopper is generally younger, slightly less educated, and more likely to be a blue-collar worker.

The trade areas for the discount stores are more than twice as large for Sunday than for Thursday. Clarks has the largest one for both days. The extent of penetration of the trade area to the east or west is influenced by the side of town in which the store is located, although north-south extensions are significant, especially on Sunday.

The importance of Sunday business for the discount stores is evident. Many people travel greater distances and spend more time doing so in order to shop on Sunday. However, numerous voices are raised in opposition to the continuance of business being conducted on this day of the week.

Nevertheless, nearly one-half of those who shop on Thursday indicate they also occasionally do so on Sunday. Only one-fourth of all those interviewed would shop downtown on Sunday, if the stores were open. Moreover, only one-third of those presently shopping on Sunday would go to the CBD if the stores were open.

Not only has the convenience of the outlying discount store changed the spatial shopping patterns of the consumer, but it has had an important influence upon his attitudes on various aspects of shopping.

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